

Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

6 November 2018

An Update on the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) Higher Education Strategy

Purpose of Report

1. To inform the committee about the progress to date of the development of the SWLEP Higher Education Strategy including plans for a Multi Campus University.

Background

2. Since 2017, officers have been working with colleagues in Swindon Borough Council on a Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership Higher Education Strategy. This was in response to the skills issues identified in the Strategic Economic Plan which include a shortage of skills at level 4 and above and low average progression rates to higher education across the area. A Direction of Travel Report was presented to and agreed by the LEP Board in May 2017. This was followed by:

i) The commissioning of a full evidence base including desk based research and surveys of young people, adults and employers, completed in March 2018.

Key issues identified from this were:

- Lack of graduate talent pool
- Forecast skills shortages at L4+
- Employers reporting higher level skill shortages
- Limited HE offer linked to LEP sector priorities beyond foundation level
- Low progression to HE and student choice not matching employer need

ii) Stakeholder engagement events were held in Swindon and Devizes in April and members invited to attend.

iii) In May 2018, a draft strategy was submitted to the LEP Board which was agreed in principle and which set high level actions to:

- Grow and promote HE provision within the area including commissioning a feasibility study for a multi-campus university
- Ensure the strategy links to the emerging local industrial strategy and future research and investment opportunities
- Promoting SWLEP area as a great place to live, work and study

- Develop our approach to an employer led skills infrastructure, reflecting the national and local industrial strategies.
- Improve educational attainment and progression to higher education

The board requested that further work was undertaken towards developing a proposal which sets out how the LEP can achieve the ambition of:

- Raising aspiration
- Growing and supporting HE through FE and;
- Developing a multi campus university

iv) Specialist consultancy support was commissioned in July to explore the concept of a multi campus university which:

- Works through models elsewhere
- Ensures synergy with the Swindon College Institute of Technology application for Swindon and North Wiltshire (and South East Gloucestershire)
- Engages businesses
- Focuses on sector strengths in different parts of the LEP area
- Ensures that the FE sector is included in the ambition

v) This options appraisal report was completed in August 2018 and a Task Group established to oversee the development of the proposal. A document will be submitted to the LEP Board in November which will outline the vision for the Multi Campus University.

Main Considerations for the Council

3. The options appraisal written for the HE task group highlighted the significant economic, social, community and cultural benefits that a multi campus university would bring to the SWLEP area beyond satisfying skills shortages. It emphasised that government policy, whilst not cash rich, is receptive to new innovative, employer led, disruptive university models. It identified that success is dependent on gaining sufficient stakeholder engagement in the chosen proposed model and securing the financial investment to take the model forward. Interviews with key personnel across the HE sector informed this work.
4. Of the three approaches presented, it was agreed that Federation, through some form of Joint Venture vehicle, was the first option to consider and could involve the three FE colleges and universities currently delivering in the area, with additional university partners and private sector employers invited to join. The Joint Venture would deliver all HE with the individual institutions acting as the campuses for delivery. The Joint Venture would expand HE and could use elements of the Incubation and Start Up scenarios to add relevant employer demanded curricula as well as the research-intensive elements that would create the ambitious university imagined by the current stakeholders. The university partner or partners would be invited to work on this project and would have strong brands capable of attracting businesses to engage and students to apply.

5. The colleges in the SWLEP area have been engaged and meetings led by Amanda Burnside, Principal of Wiltshire College and Chair of the SWLEP Skills and Talent Sub-group have taken place. Employer engagement is also underway
6. To address the issues outlined in the strategy, any plans for a new Multi Campus University in Swindon and Wiltshire need to be ambitious, the focus on Science Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM) provision clearly defined and a compelling vision outlined. The importance of the Institute of Technology application¹ as a stepping stone to achieving a coherent HE offer is emphatic. It is clear a new university model needs to be employer led with investment from the business community.
7. Funding will be required to set this initiative up as a fully resourced, work streamed project to enable it to move forward. The SWLEP is applying for additional BEIS funding made available following the Ministerial Review of LEPs. One of the purposes of this additional funding is to support the development of local industrial strategies and the Multi-Campus University will be a key feature of the SWLEP Local Industrial Strategy.

Safeguarding Considerations

8. At this stage there are no safeguarding implications.

Public Health Implications

9. There are no specific implications arising from this work.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

10. There are no specific implications arising from this work

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

11. Reducing barriers, improving inclusion, life chances and social mobility for children, young people and vulnerable groups within Wiltshire is at the heart of all the work we do. The strategy and the proposal for the multi campus university reflect the opportunities that increased higher education provision in the county will provide for all but particularly in terms of widening participation of disadvantaged groups and promoting social mobility.

Risk Assessment

12. Improved access to Higher Education (HE) is within one of the key pillars of the Business Plan, plans for a Multi Campus University will increase access to

¹ The Stage 2 Bid for an IoT will be submitted on 20th November with decisions expected to be made in the Spring

HE for residents across the county. However, the plans are in early concept stage and fruition will depend on securing significant levels of investment.

13. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report

Conclusions

14. The conclusions reached having taken all of the above into account.

Proposal

15. The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

Alan Stubbersfield
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Appendices

- 1.SWLEP Board HE update paper September 2018
 - 2.SWLEP Draft Higher Education Strategy (short version)
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